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3 March 1987**CIA NOMINATION IN TROUBLE****Iran affair shadows Gates appointment****By Warren Richey**

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Washington

The nomination of Robert Gates to replace William Casey as director of the Central Intelligence Agency has run into trouble over the issue of Mr. Gates's integrity and the lingering taint of the Iran-contra affair.

An increasing number of senators are raising questions about the suitability of the current CIA deputy director to take over as the nation's top intelligence official.

The Washington Post, citing "well-informed administration and congressional

sources," reported yesterday that Mr. Gates would withdraw his name this week. Gates said the story was inaccurate.

Yesterday White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said the President stood behind the nomination, but that the withdrawal of his name "is a matter for Mr. Gates to decide." Gates met with new chief of staff Howard Baker Jr. for about 30 minutes yesterday.

Heightened concern about the Gates nomination comes in the wake of the release last week of the Tower Commission report. The report harshly criticized top Reagan administration officials - including the President - for allowing its National Security Council staff to conduct covert operations, including arms sales to Iran and funding the Nicaraguan contra rebels.

The report mentioned Gates in only a few references, suggesting that he played only a minor, supportive role in

the secret Iran initiative. Gates has said he knew nothing of the contra diversion scheme until he received hints of it last October.

Nonetheless, Gates is viewed by some in the Senate and the White House as having been too close to Mr. Casey to be able to shield the administration and the CIA from future tar-

nish in a year that promises to be dominated by Iran-contra investigations.

Former Nevada senator and Reagan friend Paul Laxalt said Sunday that Gates's nomination has been tainted with the "smell of Irangate."

Last week, the chairman and vice-chairman of the Senate select committee investigating the Iran-contra matter asked that Senate consideration of the Gates nomination be postponed until after both the House and Senate special committees complete their investigations. The move would delay the nomination vote until late summer.

The delay was sought to allay the concerns of some members of Congress that confirmation of Gates without a thorough investigation might leave a cloud of suspicion over the CIA.

Senate Intelligence Committee members are wondering whether Gates acted forcefully enough in investigating the contra diversion scheme when he first learned of it last October.

In addition, questions have been raised about Gates's involvement in providing the intelligence to support a 1985 Reagan administration plan for a joint Egyptian-US invasion of Libya.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is reported to have rejected then national-security adviser John Poin-dexter's proposal of a joint military operation designed to oust Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi.

On Friday Gates provided the Senate committee with materials intended to ease members' concerns about his role in planning the proposed invasion. The materials are said to show that Gates had opposed the invasion plan.

Gates's role at the CIA is not a subject of extensive examination in the Tower Commission report. But the report does make serious criticisms of the CIA, and by implication of Gates, for failing to uphold the "integrity and objectivity of the intelligence process."

The panel's report criticizes the CIA for apparently permitting NSC staff members to become involved in the preparation of a key intelligence analysis of the situation in Iran in May 1985. The analysis "contained the hint that the United States should change its existing policy and encourage its allies to provide arms to Iran." The document was later used by NSC staff members to support plans to begin the secret Iran arms initiative.

At the time, Gates was deputy director for intelligence at the CIA and oversaw the drafting of US intelligence reports. Gates was subsequently promoted by Casey and became the CIA's deputy director in April 1986.

"It is critical that the line between intelligence and advocacy of a particular policy be preserved if intelligence is to retain its integrity and perform its proper function," the Tower Commission report says. It adds, "In this instance, the CIA came close enough to the line to warrant concern."